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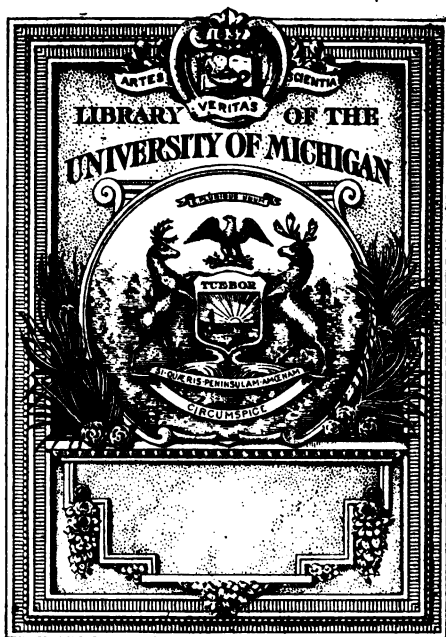
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SANCTUARY

A PLAY IN ONE SCENE

By

JOSEPH LAWREN



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SANCTUARY

A PLAY IN ONE SCENE

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

THE GIRL.

THE GOOD MAN

THE BAD MAN

THE TWO COWBOYS.

32-12-50

SANCTUARY

SCENE

THE interior of a shack on the open prairie. The one window, free of its curtain, looks out on the undulating plain, blue-black of a clear night. The rear wall has a door with a wooden bolt. On the walls of stiff mud-red paper are hung several prints and pictures in rich and tasteful frames. Several femininizing touches on the walls. A small mahogany tip table, on which are scattered well worn books and magazines, stands near the window. On the table a green shaded lamp with an extra red globe. A trunk in one corner, a small mirrorless bureau in the other. Several sun-warped rocking chairs complete the interior.

As the curtain rises the opalescent darkness becomes pregnant with the clear moonlight streaming through the window. A short tense silence broken by the indistinct patter of hoofs, which grows louder and louder and finally terminates in the raucous breathing of a spent horse.

THE GIRL

(with bounding vitality bursts in through closed door; a Promethean picture in the startling clarity of the brilliant moonlight. She is dressed in the riding costume of the prairie with a flowing bandana around a slender neck. A gentle, repressed spirit of refinement belies the coarse dress. She breathes hard and fast, and as she enters brushes aside a disheveled wisp of golden hair.)

"Splendid! What a night! Poor Captain! But who could resist the glorious dash. Poor dear, he must be so terribly tired. A drink and a lump of sugar, and then freedom and the open prairie. *(While talking, she sheds a pair of gauntlets on the dressing table, and hangs her small riding hat on a nail above the dressing bureau. She pours some water from a pitcher into a small basin and disappears with it out of the door. The avid gulping of a horse on the outside. The creak of unleashed leather is heard and THE GIRL returns dragging a forty pound riding saddle which she slides into a corner.)* What a truly glorious moon—so round and big, one could almost dispense with a lamp. I must reread my letters. A sixteen mile ride sharpens one's desire to pursue at leisure what one first catches under the focused attention of the hangers-on at mail time. *(Lights the lamp, washes her face and hands in the small basin which had served as a trough for the horse, and then seats herself, in the rocking chair, with many feminine sighs and movements of repose and comfort.*

The rays of the reading lamp set her golden hair aflame with color and vitality. She fingers her three letters which she removes from her bosom, and circumspectly chooses one, while she lays the others on the table. She smoothes out the letter on her lap and reads slowly, as if cogitating its contents as she reads.)

MY DEAR MISS WALLING:

The School Board of Hopkinton request me to inform you that your old position in the High School is open for you whensoever you please us by accepting the same. The Board desires me to express its deep appreciation of your splendid work here and the members individually desire to convey to you their sincerest hope that an early and complete cure will send you back to us in time for the next school term.

Sincerely yours,

The School Committee of Hopkinton

By Charles A. Wells, Secretary.

(She folds the letter with a deep sigh, and returns it to its envelope.) One would grow well indeed if one had but good letters to read. But this grips the heart of the prisoner bound. (As the GIRL takes up another letter, a man's face peers stealthily through the window. The man's face softens and melts into sudden hope. He straightens to his full height, and moves quickly away from the window. The door is noiselessly opened and THE BAD MAN enters silently. He stands immobile, with eyes only animated. A few hard lines on a strong regular-cut face. THE GIRL continues to read absorbingly.)

MY DEAREST DOROTHY:

This note is sent you through the kindness of "Oklahoma" of the X Bar L, where I shall be detained for the next three days buying cattle for our Ranch. You must feel with me the deep joy with which I go about this labor of love—this acquisition of the living lares et penates of our home. With the purchase of the cattle finished, I shall hurry back to you, and then—for the building of the Home. Till then, my dearest Dorothy, believe me,

Your lover,

RICHARD.

(THE GIRL *sighs softly and then bursts into uncontrollable fervor.*) Home—our Home—what a word! I love it with a passion greater than love. A Home—and dear Richard in it—what a glorious prospect—what ineffable joy."

(THE GIRL *turns and sees the BAD MAN, standing with down-cast eyes, like a child caught eavesdropping. THE GIRL starts with a sharp cry, straightens defiantly and composedly says*) Well!

THE BAD MAN

(*Utters no sound in response, but straightens to the challenge, and looks THE GIRL unfearingly in the eye. A long portentous silence.*)

THE GIRL

What do you want here—with me?

THE BAD MAN

(*catching the sinister meaning thrown into the last two words, colors, clears his throat with a sharp cough, and answers decisively*). We bad men of the West don't do such things—we leave that for the good men of the East. I came here for a little rest, for what a high toned writing man—an author—once called Sanctuary.

(THE GIRL *raises her head, the tension of her fear not altogether relieved by the disclaimer of the BAD MAN, who hurries on apologetically*). I sure did not mean to hear that there letter, but the door shut afore I knew what you were reading, so just naturally I was kept a prisoner, while that there Cupid talked to you. Don't worry, mam, I sure can keep a secret—of that kind.

THE GIRL

(*keeping the BAD MAN within her focused attention, with fear receding*). Where is your horse?

THE BAD MAN

A dog hole—three miles back—with a hole in his head. Poor Dick.

THE GIRL

(*Starts horrified, then quickly repressing her fears*)
Dick—poor Dick—why that?

THE BAD MAN

The name of my horse.

THE GIRL

(laughs nervously). Yes, of course, your horse.

(The girl's eyes alight for an instant on the two guns slung in THE BAD MAN's holster, then her attention darts to the unused Winchester hung so ornamentally on the wall—then her eyes flash back to the BAD MAN). Why didn't you knock?

THE BAD MAN

(falteringly) Because—well, men aren't bad with women in this country, and then besides, I didn't want to disturb you from reading those letters. But I would have knocked if I knowed those were love letters.

THE GIRL

(suddenly swirling in a new impulse). Do you know Mr. Richard Loring?

THE BAD MAN

"Dick" Loring, him they call the GOOD MAN? Oh, yes, I know him a bit.

THE GIRL

(Surprisingly) Dick! Good Man! He is good to me—I mean he is good to everyone, but I didn't know his goodness had spread so quickly amongst you.

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THE BAD MAN

Oh, yes—goodness, like good news, spreads quickly out here, and a good man is sure a good bit of good news out here, where all men grow—bad.

THE GIRL

(chagrined at the lack of impression created by the name of her lover, and fearing that this final shield from attack of the BAD MAN had proved futile, and a bit frightened at the hint of intimacy with her lover, she diverts the tendency of the conversation.) You must be quite lame. You rest here, while I ride to the Lazy Q for a new horse. You can leave him with Sheriff Ball at Windy City when you get there.

THE BAD MAN

(startles perceptibly at the mention of the Sheriff, and replies evenly and firmly). No, don't leave here.

THE GIRL

(veils her rising fears behind an airy and flippant reply). As you will, sir, you are the Lord of the House.

THE BAD MAN

(catching the false note of fear in the assumed levity of her tone and manner.) No, I ain't the Lord of the House. I'm but a lone stranger, dog-gone tired and thirsty and I came to beg for—Sanctuary.



THE GIRL

(eyeing the Bad Man sharply.) You shall have it here—Sanctuary. But it is late. By replacing this green globe with the red one, I can fetch any Lazy Q rider within five miles. I am sure he will get me a new horse for you. You can return it from Windy City. Meanwhile let me brew you a cup of tea. *(as she is about to change the globes.)*

THE BAD MAN

(softly, but with iron in his voice.) Don't put on the red globe. I don't need help. *(a pause)* You don't need help.

THE GIRL

(alarmed) What right have you to give orders to me in my own house? What hidden reason has brought you to the lone cabin of an unprotected girl? *(suddenly)* Oh, if he were only here.

THE BAD MAN

(echoes fervently) Oh, if he were only here.

THE GIRL

What, you wish he were here, a wish, which granted, would terminate your unwelcome presence here. Well, sir, you are indeed a splendid example of the chivalry of the West—a strong man in a weak girl's room—against her wishes.



THE BAD MAN

(while the girl turns, THE BAD MAN pulls down the window curtain and then stands sharply to attention. The girl turns in time to catch the culmination and portent of the act.)

THE GIRL

How dare you put in jeopardy that which is dearer to a young girl than life itself—her reputation.

THE BAD MAN

(quietly) Beg pardon, lady, out here on the prairies a man in a girl's cabin at night does not put in jep-jepordy her reputation—like back East. A horse's foot in a dog hole, a blinding snow storm, and he is driven into a girl's cabin. *(as he speaks, he casually slides the two guns from their holsters.)*

THE GIRL

(in great perturbation.) Oh, don't.

THE BAD MAN

(smiles blandly as he hands the two guns to THE GIRL.) Here, take them, they are your's—as long as I am here.

THE GIRL

(with evident relief takes the two guns from the BAD MAN and lays them on her lap as she seats herself in her rocking chair. With the change from perturbation to mental ease her manner and tone toward

the BAD MAN changes from suspicion to curiosity.)
Why do you want the curtains down?

THE BAD MAN

(catching the change in the Girl's manner, seats himself in a chair opposite the Girl.) Because I want—Sanctuary.

THE GIRL

(airily) And pray, for how long do you desire this boon?

THE BAD MAN

(fervently and earnestly.) Until the end—forever.

THE GIRL

(a bit terrified at the earnestness in his tone). Forever?

THE BAD MAN

Forever—and a day.

THE GIRL

And if you can't have the forever, will you take the day?

THE BAD MAN

Beggars cannot be choosers. A cat may stand before a queen, but cannot stand there against her wishes.

THE GIRL

A Queen! You are a flatterer, Mr. Unknown.

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THE BAD MAN

Mr. Bad Man—to be truthful.

THE GIRL

But not quite a bad man at compliments.

THE BAD MAN

At truth—Miss Unknown.

THE GIRL

(views with increasing surprise the quick sloughing of the prairie dialect to the ease and precision and airiness of cultured conversation.) I still insist that you are Mr. Unknown. You come here unwelcomed and unannounced; why, you have refused to state. A slight bruise and a dead horse never drove a man to the shelter of a girl's cabin on this prairie. Come, tell me. You have delivered yourself in my hand, now deliver yourself into my confidence. Both are sacred while under my roof.

THE BAD MAN

Your generosity makes your request difficult to refuse. It is indeed generous for you to insist upon my being Mr. Unknown instead of Mr. BAD MAN, which is my name out here among those who know. Confidence not only breeds but calls for confidence. *(straightens perceptibly.)* I am here because I killed a man.

THE GIRL

(*Startled out of her ease and chair.*) You killed a man?

THE BAD MAN

No, I killed a grown male.

THE GIRL

And the posse!

THE BAD MAN

(*Takes out a watch and puckers his brow at its contents.*) About two miles behind straining their quirts to put a rope around my neck. There is no chance, there was no chance. Therefore, I gambled with your generosity.

THE GIRL

You mean?

THE BAD MAN

I mean that if you are alone when they come I have a chance for life.

THE GIRL

Then you gamble—with my honor.

THE BAD MAN

Not with your honor, with your reputation.

THE GIRL

Oh, I see you compliment yourself most subtly.

THE BAD MAN

On being an Unknown instead of a BAD MAN.
Pray give me the benefit of the choice.

THE GIRL

I shall. Here are your pistols, in case of trouble.
(*she hands him his two pistols.*)

THE BAD MAN

No, thank you, I have the blood of one man on my hands already. I'll take no other. You may have the pistols and give me—Sanctuary.

THE GIRL

You shall have it to pray in, for ultimately you will be captured and hung.

THE BAD MAN

If so, I hope it shall be high in your estimation.

THE GIRL

How can I tell unless I know whom you killed. I have lived here over a year, and perhaps it is someone I know.

THE BAD MAN

I don't know. I thought you knew him, but I am now convinced you didn't.

THE GIRL

You thought I knew him? You are convinced I didn't? It's puzzling. I don't understand.

THE BAD MAN

Neither do I—he was such a puzzle.

THE GIRL

(*alarmed*) Oh, pray tell me. It can't possibly be one I know well. Oh, I know so very few here.

THE BAD MAN

(*stops and listens to the faint muffled approach of horses.*) You will know soon, I hear the posse.

THE GIRL

(*caught in a sudden impulse rushes to the window and is about to throw aside the curtain.*)

THE BAD MAN

Don't—remember your promise of Sanctuary.

THE GIRL

(*arrested by the compelling tone of the BAD MAN, turns reluctantly from the curtained window as the posse gallop by; both listen in constrained attitudes till the noise of the disappearing cavalcade dies down in the distance.*)

THE BAD MAN

(*simply*) A thousand thanks for my life.

THE GIRL

None are required for a kept promise—thank you for preventing my breaking it.

THE BAD MAN

You have given me a chance for life—the second time.

THE GIRL

(*puzzled*) A second time?

THE BAD MAN

(*the slow, tentative beats of horses are heard approaching the door. THE GIRL and the BAD MAN look puzzled at each other as if to question silently the meaning of these unlooked for riders. THE GIRL's look of surprise gives way to one of fear as dismounting riders are heard outside the door.*) The die is cast.

THE GIRL

(*Positively*) The die is cast. Hide quickly.

THE BAD MAN

If they search and find me—your reputation is ruined.

THE GIRL

But not my honor. You have saved that. This is no time for fine discriminations. Quick, hide.

(as the BAD MAN hides behind the curtain of the little bed, the door is thrown open. The Two COWBOYS enter supporting the limp form of a man who fiercely tries to galvanize the dying strength as he tries to break fumblingly from the grasp of THE TWO COWBOYS. THE GIRL sees the dying man, utters a wild cry and rushes in time to help him sink helplessly into the easy chair, formerly occupied by the BAD MAN.)

God! It is you!

THE GOOD MAN

It is I, Dorothy. I want my last words with you alone—before I go.

THE TWO COWBOYS

(with downcast faces make their way sorrowfully from the room, and as they approach the door.) Call us, when you want us, Ma'am.

THE GIRL

(props the GOOD MAN up in the chair, while her dry eyed grief works convulsively for expression.)

THE GOOD MAN

(*struggles for expression*) It's all over, Dorothy, I can't die with a lie on my lips, and a man's life on my conscience. I loved you. When you grew ill, I followed you out here. But the country was too large—too elemental. It engulfed me. It knocked the props of the conventions from under me, and I found that all my morality, all my strength, all my love, were supported by those conventionalities. It was on the broad, unbridled, unconventional land here that my little house of cards began falling around me. In the East, I was truthful because people heard. Here I lied because only God heard. The abounding strength, the revitalized flesh which came to me here, cried, fought, clamored for its lust. My moral strength gave way. I discovered that I was sexually weak back in the East. My weakness was my strength out back there. Here when desire came upon me, I could not withstand it; I drank, I followed the lure of the painted ladies in Windy City. I lied to you; lied to you in my letters; lied to you by implication; lied to you in my love. But I did love you; only I was weak—so weak. The strength of this country weakened me. You must understand and think not too ill of me when I am gone. And when I wrote you last that I was at the X Bar L, I was in Windy City on a debauch. I was drunk. I talked, I talked too much, your name was mentioned. I must have said something disparaging about you,

and then inexplicably, BAD MAN CHARLIE fired, and all the prostitutes in the brothel leered at the deed, "To close my lying mouth", he said, as he darted off. A posse has gone after him, but you must see that he is freed. I deserved it. But I am afraid that it may be too late, unless he has found Sanctuary. I can't understand it—he never spoke of you. I did not know he knew you. But I can't, I won't think. It can't be true. Some say he was in love with you secretly, while some say he was your secret lover. You know he is an Easterner with a thick coat of the prairie about him. But it's only rumor; I have seen him in his true colors on one occasion. I am dying, Dorothy, but I want to go to my Maker with your forgiveness to light the way, and your assurance that my love, broken as it now is, was the only one—(*falters*).

THE GIRL

(*quietly and sympathetically*) I can't believe it, Dick dear, it is but the flagellation of a dying mind. As to this BAD MAN CHARLIE, I do not know him.

THE BAD MAN

(*works his way from his hiding place, draws himself noiselessly and breathlessly to a standing posture. His foot creaks.*)

THE GOOD MAN

(*attracted by the sound, turns and catches sight of the BAD MAN.*) God, there he is!

THE GIRL

(*simply*) A man who has sought Sanctuary here for killing a man.

THE GOOD MAN

For killing me! My God, it is true; those only are blind who will not see. I see it all; all hope is lost. All is darkness. I die amidst torturing doubts. flaming fears, wretchedness, bitterness.

THE BAD MAN

(*calmly facing the dying*) Listen while I sing my swan song. I came here as you did. The country got me as it got you. I wallowed in the mire. BAD MAN CHARLIE was the apotheosis of all evil. Then I saw her, the first sight of feminine refinement and purity that I had seen in seven years. The old life back East came back to me. It was a sharp nostalgia. I sickened for a return of purity and refinement, I worshipped her. She did not know; you did not know. I could not defile my love with its expression. But I treasured it, and fought with it,—with myself. She, unknowingly, was pulling me out of the depths of debasement and despair to the firm ground of morality. I worshipped her, and when I saw you crush under foot the love I knew she bore, I could hardly restrain myself. Then came the Windy City brothel. In a fit of anger and while you were flaunting her love in the faces of scorn of the painted ladies, I became blinded and shot you. I cannot explain

